THE PUNISHER
MARVEL
EDMONDSON
GERADS
015

FRANK CASTLE was once a decorated Marine officer, an upstanding citizen and family man. Then his family was violently taken from him when they were accidentally killed in a mob hit. From that day on, Frank Castle shed his old identity and became a force of cold, calculated retribution and vigilantism known as

THE PUNISHER

PREVIOUSLY

It's been a long road back to Los Angeles for Frank. After being shot by the Howling Commandos, the Punisher escaped south of the border, where he was captured by a drug lord, sold, escaped, voluntarily sent to prison, and escaped again. In the Punisher's absence the gangs have risen, led by the second Del Sol brother, plunging L.A. into chaos.

The disgraced Officer Stone was sent to prison for emulating her idol The Punisher's vigilante ways. When Del Sol liberated her prison to further L.A.'s undoing, he sent a group of thugs to teach the rogue cop a lesson.

Under orders from above, the Howling Commandos lured Frank into the open by kidnapping his only remaining family. Despite Frank's best efforts, he was shot and captured.

A HOLE IN THE GROUND

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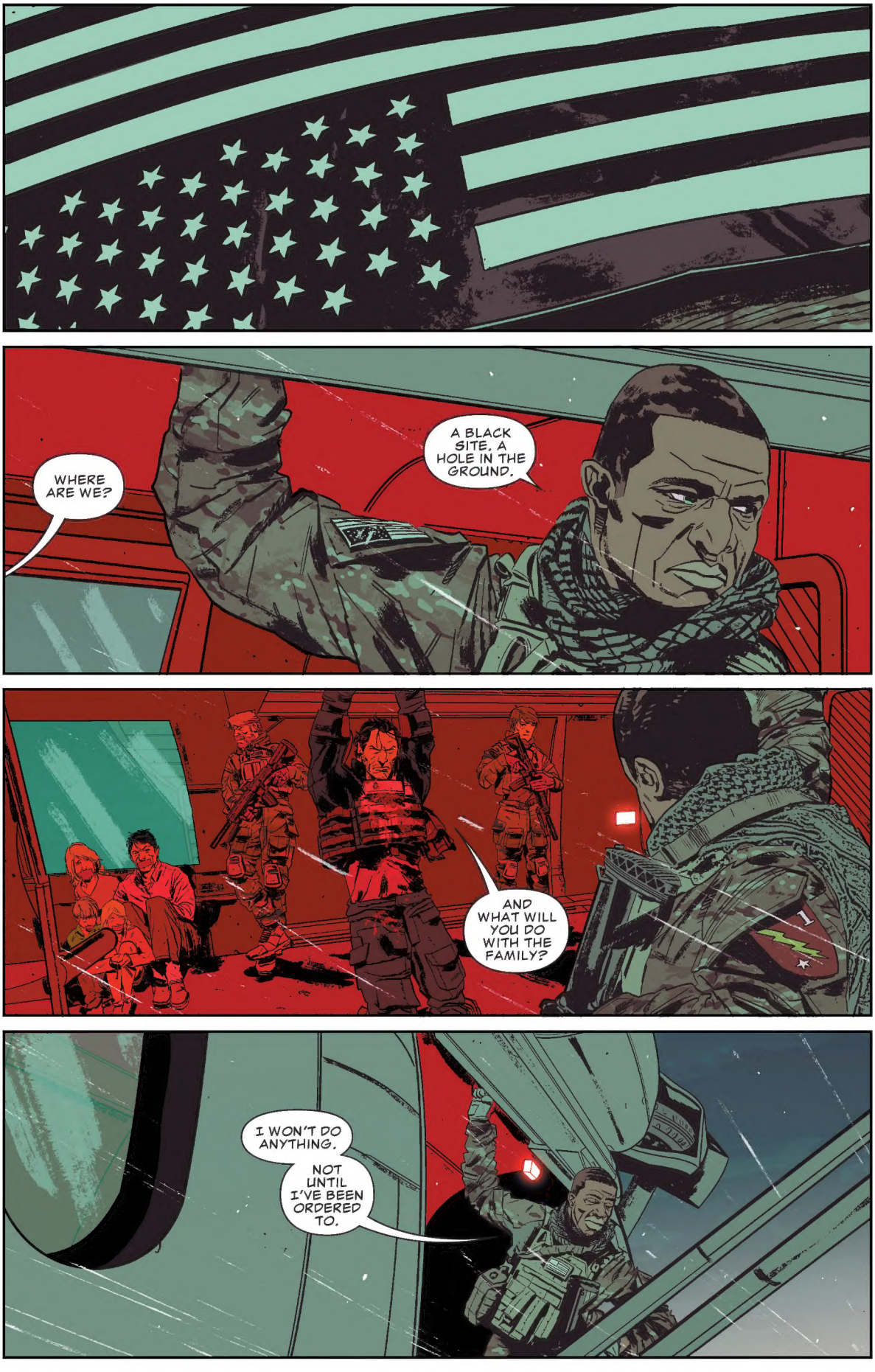

WHERE ARE WE?
A BLACK SITE. A HOLE IN THE GROUND.
AND WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE FAMILY?
I WON'T DO ANYTHING.
NOT UNTIL I'VE BEEN ORDERED TO.

THAT'S A TON OF EQUIPMENT.
THEY'RE GOING TO LIBERATE LOS ANGELES.

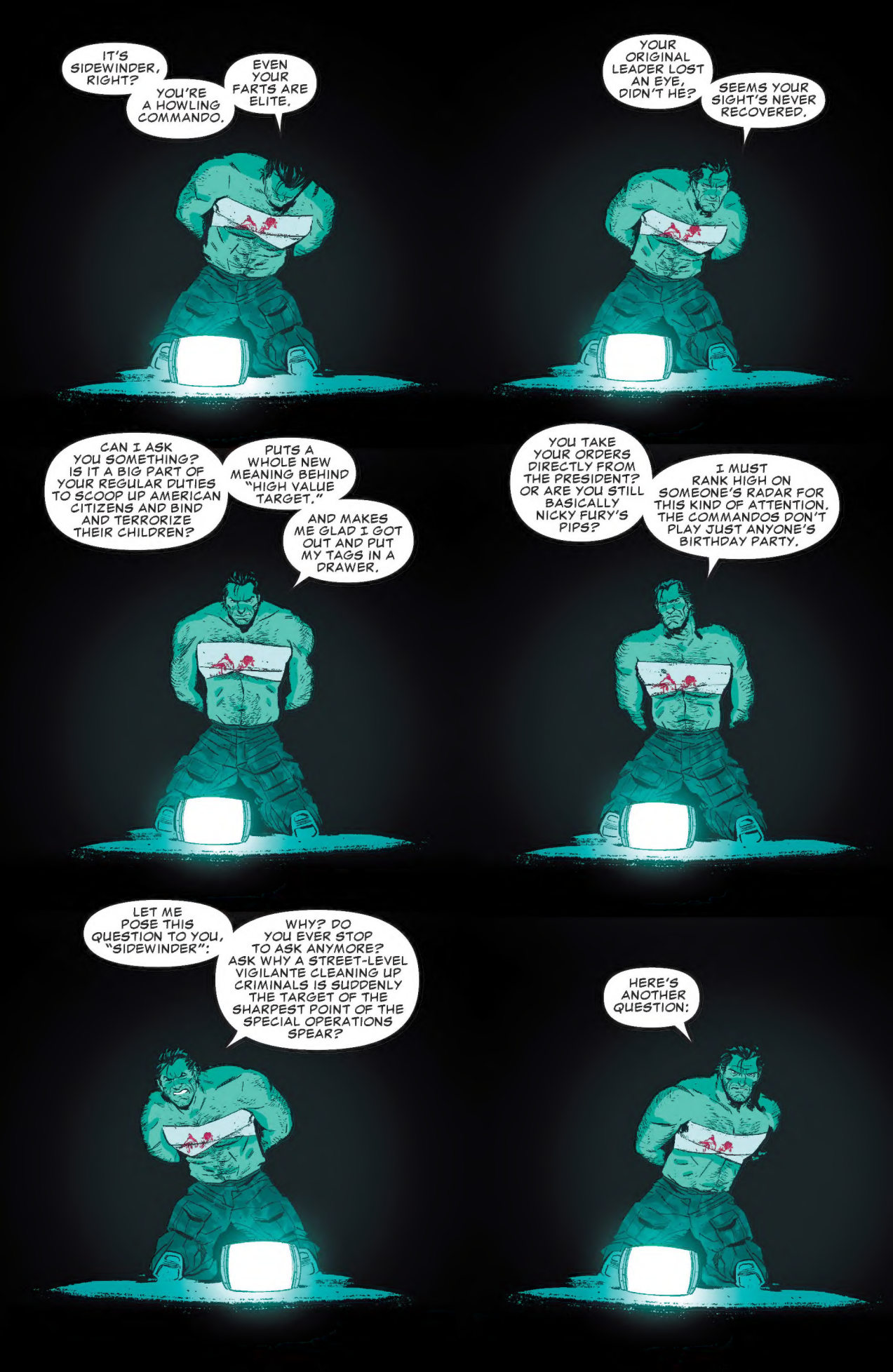
BEING THE PUNISHER WAS ALWAYS A WAY TO ESCAPE THINKING.
TO SWIM UP INSTEAD OF SINKING DOWN.
NOT TO BE STILL.

BUT MY HANDS ARE TIED, AND I'M DROWNING.
I'LL HAVE TO BE MORE CLEVER TO FIGHT MY WAY UP...

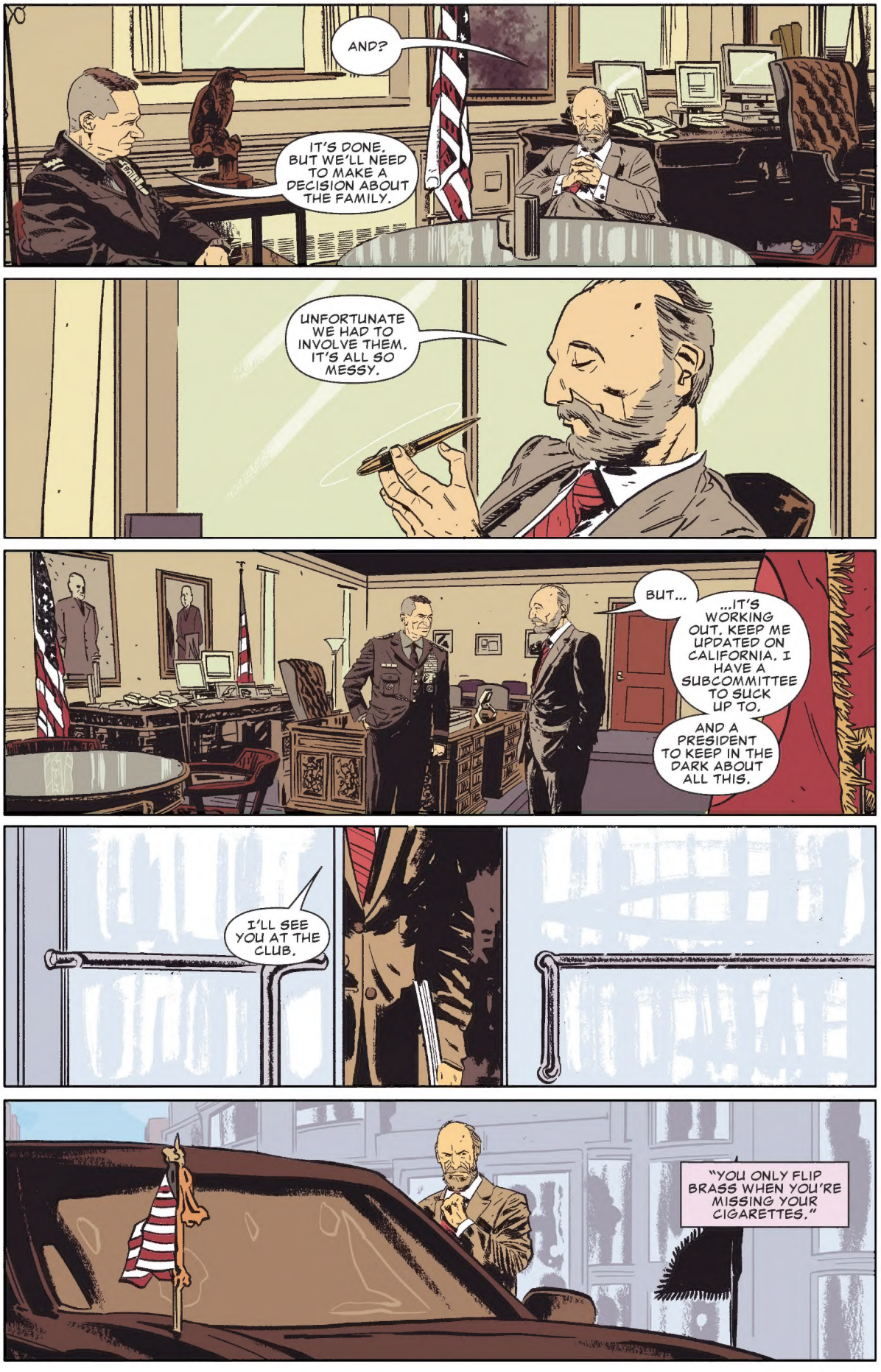
JOINT FORCES TRAINING BASE.
LOS ALAMITOS, CALIFORNIA.
GOING UP AGAINST THE U.S. MILITARY WILL REQUIRE AN OUNCE OF CLEVERNESS...
...AND A POUND OF SOMETHING WORSE.

LOS ANGELES.
UNGH!
OOF!
ARRRGH!
CRACK
I WAS TAUGHT TO MAKE THE STEAL MORE EXPENSIVE THAN IT'S WORTH.
P.O.W.'S WERE TAUGHT THIS IN WORLD WAR II. DISTRACT THE ENEMY, DRAIN THEIR ENERGY. HOPE THEY DON'T SHOOT YOU FOR IT.
BUT ACCEPT THAT THEY MIGHT.

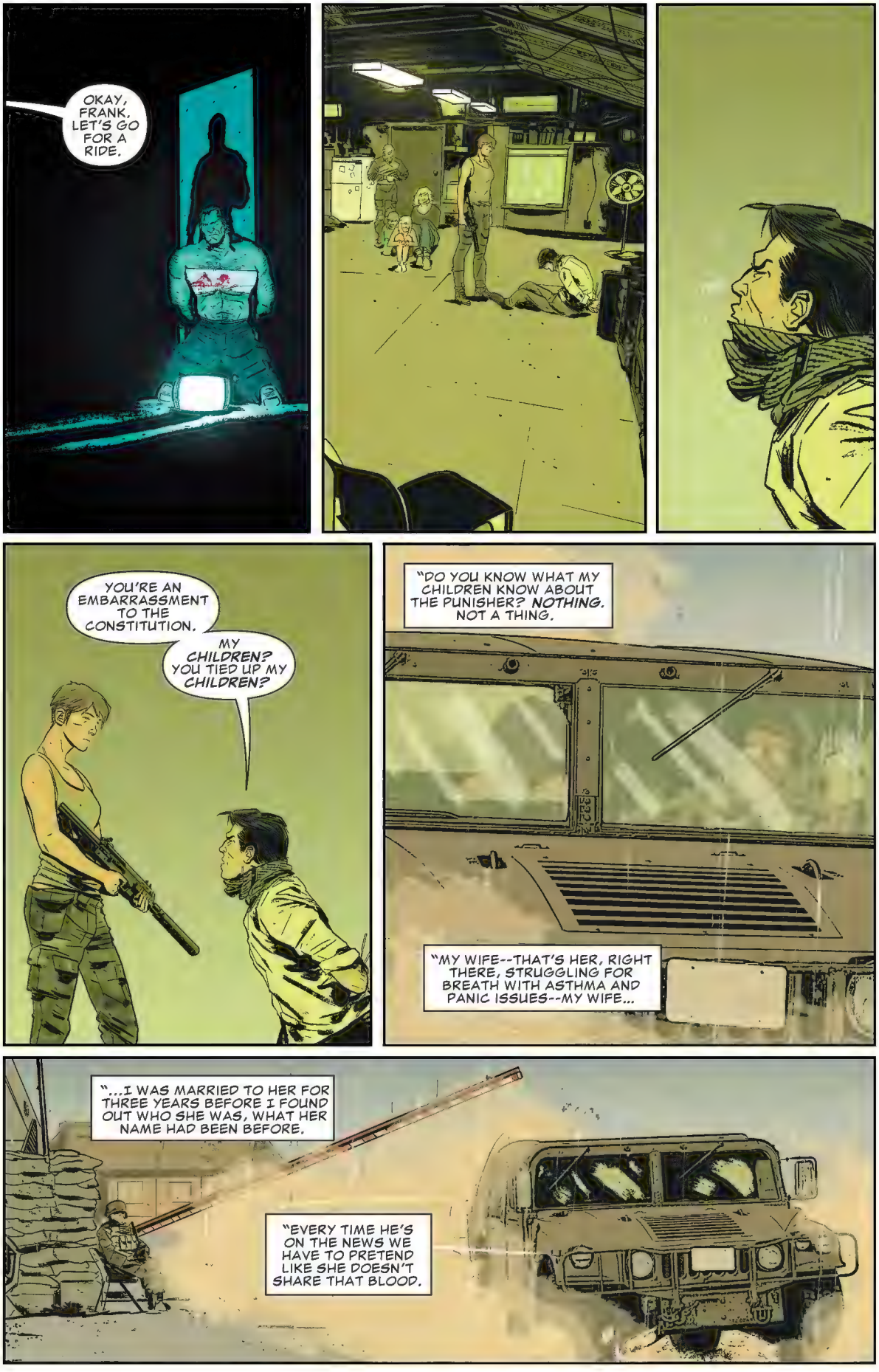
MAKE THE STEAL MORE EXPENSIVE THAN IT'S WORTH.
BITE THE DOGCATCHER'S HAND. AGAIN, AND AGAIN.
IT'S WORKED OUT FOR ME FOR A WHILE NOW.
THE COPS WOULD RATHER LEAVE ME ALONE.
WHICH MAKES IT EASY TO KEEP UP AN ETHOS NOT TO KILL A PUBLIC SERVANT. *MADE* IT EASY.
IT'S GOING TO RAIN IN CALIFORNIA TODAY.
WHILE I'M WATERBOARDED WITH THE FLAG OVER MY FACE.


IT'S SIDEWINDER, RIGHT?
YOU'RE A HOWLING COMMANDO.
EVEN YOUR FARTS ARE ELITE.
YOUR ORIGINAL LEADER LOST AN EYE, DIDN'T HE?
SEEMS YOUR SIGHT'S NEVER RECOVERED.
CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING? IS IT A BIG PART OF YOUR REGULAR DUTIES TO SCOOP UP AMERICAN CITIZENS AND BIND AND TERRORIZE THEIR CHILDREN?
PUTS A WHOLE NEW MEANING BEHIND "HIGH VALUE TARGET."
AND MAKES ME GLAD I GOT OUT AND PUT MY TAGS IN A DRAWER.
YOU TAKE YOUR ORDERS DIRECTLY FROM THE PRESIDENT? OR ARE YOU STILL BASICALLY NICKY FURY'S PIPS?
I MUST RANK HIGH ON SOMEONE'S RADAR FOR THIS KIND OF ATTENTION. THE COMMANDOS DON'T PLAY JUST ANYONE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY.
LET ME POSE THIS QUESTION TO YOU, "SIDEWINDER":
WHY? DO YOU EVER STOP TO ASK ANYMORE? ASK WHY A STREET-LEVEL VIGILANTE CLEANING UP CRIMINALS IS SUDDENLY THE TARGET OF THE SHARPEST POINT OF THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS SPEAR?
HERE'S ANOTHER QUESTION:

WHO'S SUPPLYING THE DOS SOLES CARTEL WITH TOP-SECRET AMERICAN CHEMICAL WEAPONS?
THAT'S A QUESTION FAR ABOVE MY PAY GRADE.
BUT THE ANSWER INVOLVES A GREAT MANY INNOCENT LIVES.
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP
UNKNOWN CALLER
GO FOR SIDEWINDER.
WHAT'S CASTLE'S STATUS?
WE'RE IN HOLDING AT THE BLACK SITE.
WHEN THE MILITARY IS CLEAR OF THE AREA, TAKE HIM TO THE DESERT.
EXECUTE HIM THERE.
AND THE FAMILY?
CONTINUE TO HOLD THE FAMILY.


AND?
IT'S DONE. BUT WE'LL NEED TO MAKE A DECISION ABOUT THE FAMILY.
UNFORTUNATE WE HAD TO INVOLVE THEM. IT'S ALL SO MESSY.
BUT...
...IT'S WORKING OUT. KEEP ME UPDATED ON CALIFORNIA. I HAVE A SUBCOMMITTEE TO SUCK UP TO.
AND A PRESIDENT TO KEEP IN THE DARK ABOUT ALL THIS.
I'LL SEE YOU AT THE CLUB.
"YOU ONLY FLIP BRASS WHEN YOU'RE MISSING YOUR CIGARETTES."

BEEN A WHILE.
SO WHAT ABOUT THE FAMILY?
YES, SIR.
STAY WITH THEM. I'M LEAVING WITH CASTLE.
THEY'RE SENDING A TON OF ARMOR INTO L.A.
THEY MUST HAVE BEEN BUILDING FORCES UP HERE FOR WEEKS.
IF NOT LONGER. THIS IS HEAVY EQUIPMENT FOR A NATIONAL GUARD TRAINING CENTER.
AND THAT LOOKED LIKE WE WERE REINVADING FALLUJAH.
SOMETHING YOU WANT TO SAY, FIRST SERGEANT?
NEGATIVE, SOLDIER. I'M GOOD.


OKAY, FRANK. LET'S GO FOR A RIDE.
YOU'RE AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION.
MY CHILDREN? YOU TIED UP MY CHILDREN?
"DO YOU KNOW WHAT MY CHILDREN KNOW ABOUT THE PUNISHER? NOTHING. NOT A THING.
"MY WIFE--THAT'S HER, RIGHT THERE, STRUGGLING FOR BREATH WITH ASTHMA AND PANIC ISSUES--MY WIFE...
"...I WAS MARRIED TO HER FOR THREE YEARS BEFORE I FOUND OUT WHO SHE WAS, WHAT HER NAME HAD BEEN BEFORE.
"EVERY TIME HE'S ON THE NEWS WE HAVE TO PRETEND LIKE SHE DOESN'T SHARE THAT BLOOD.

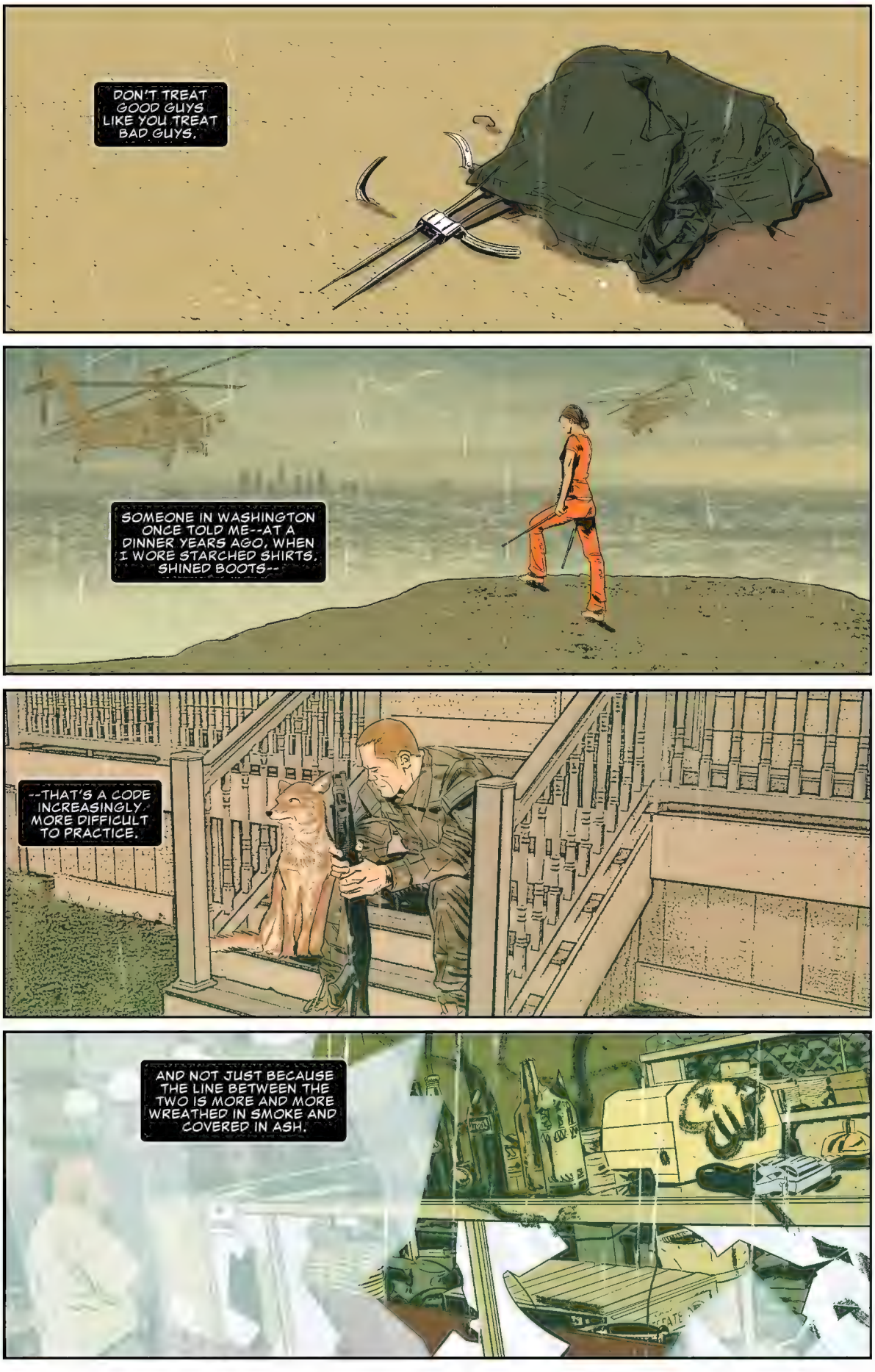
"I'M A LAWYER. REMEMBER THAT WHEN I SUE YOU AND WHATEVER UNIT YOU'RE FROM UNTIL YOU'RE WORKING MALL SECURITY IN MINNEAPOLIS, G.I. JANE.
"BUT I'M A LAWYER AND THE REASON I HATE THE PUNISHER IN OUR LIVES IS BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN *JUSTICE* AND THE *RULE OF LAW.*"
BUT YOU KNOW WHAT?
AFTER *YOU GUYS*, I APPROVE OF WHAT HE'S DOING. IN FACT...
...I HOPE HE PUNISHES *ALL* OF YOU.
OKAY, MR. LAWYER...
...BACK IN THE GAG FOR YOU.
OUT.
ANYTHING YOU WANT TO TELL ME?
WHAT?
-COUGH- WHEN ANY PERSON... -COUGH-

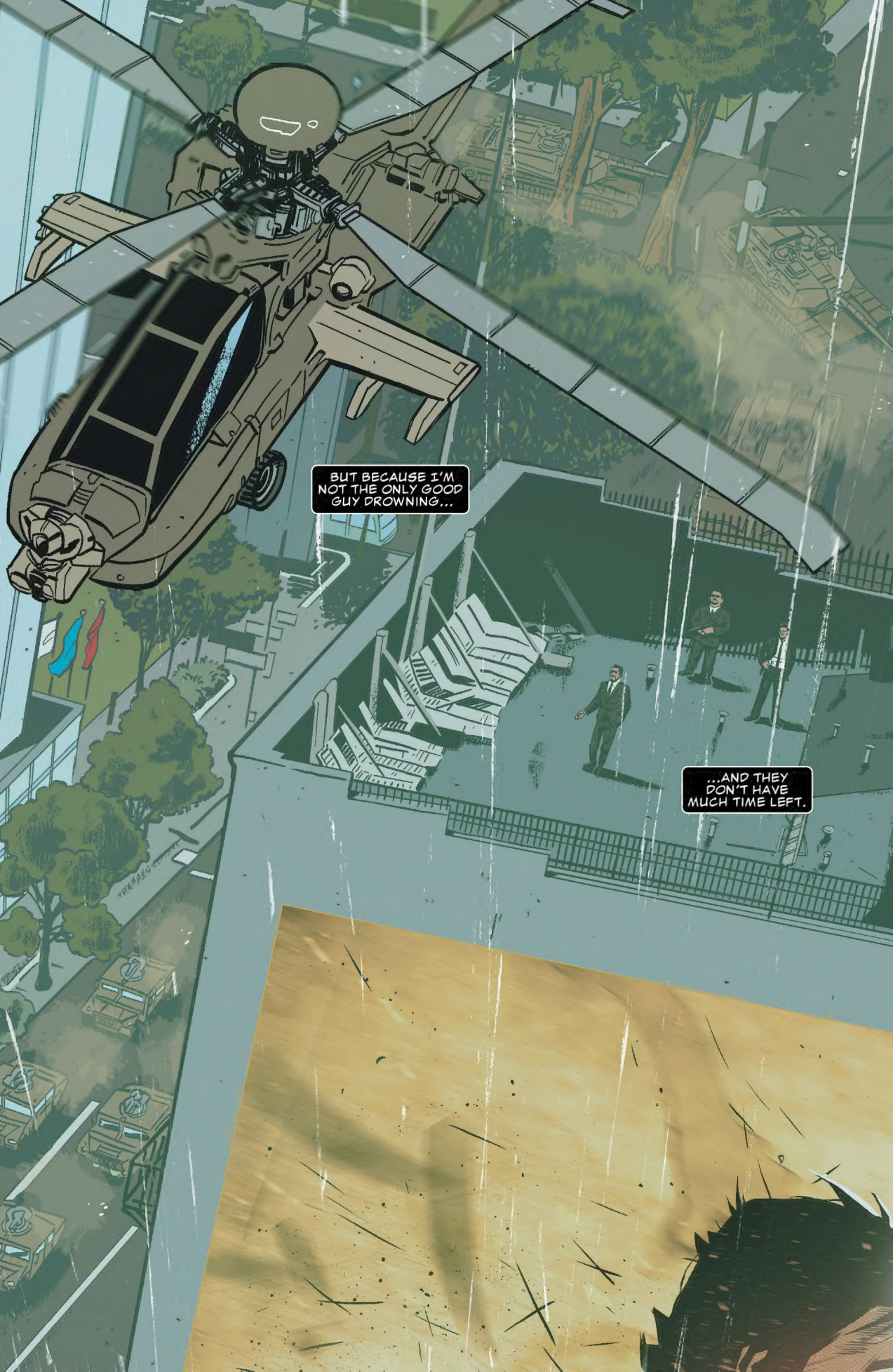
PLACED UNDER ARREST...CONFINEMENT... PRIOR TO TRIAL...
...IMMEDIATE STEPS SHALL BE TAKEN TO INFORM HIM OF THE SPECIFIC WRONG OF WHICH HE IS ACCUSED...
THE UNIFORM CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE? REALLY?
I THOUGHT YOU PUT YOUR TAGS IN A DRAWER.
BUT YOU DIDN'T.
ASK YOURSELF WHY. ASK WHY THE MILITARY IS ONLY MOVING IN ON LOS ANGELES NOW. WHY THEY WERE ALL READY.
ASK WHO STANDS TO BENEFIT. FROM ALL OF THIS.
FROM ME DEAD.
YOU TELL ME.
I DON'T KNOW.
BUT I CAN FIND OUT.
WHAT WOULD YOU NEED?

WHACK
IT'S A NIGHTMARE.
SKULLGUY'S DEAD! THE COPS ARE DEAD! THE CITY IS OURS!
THE WHOLE DAMN CITY IS OURS!
NOT FOR LONG IT ISN'T.

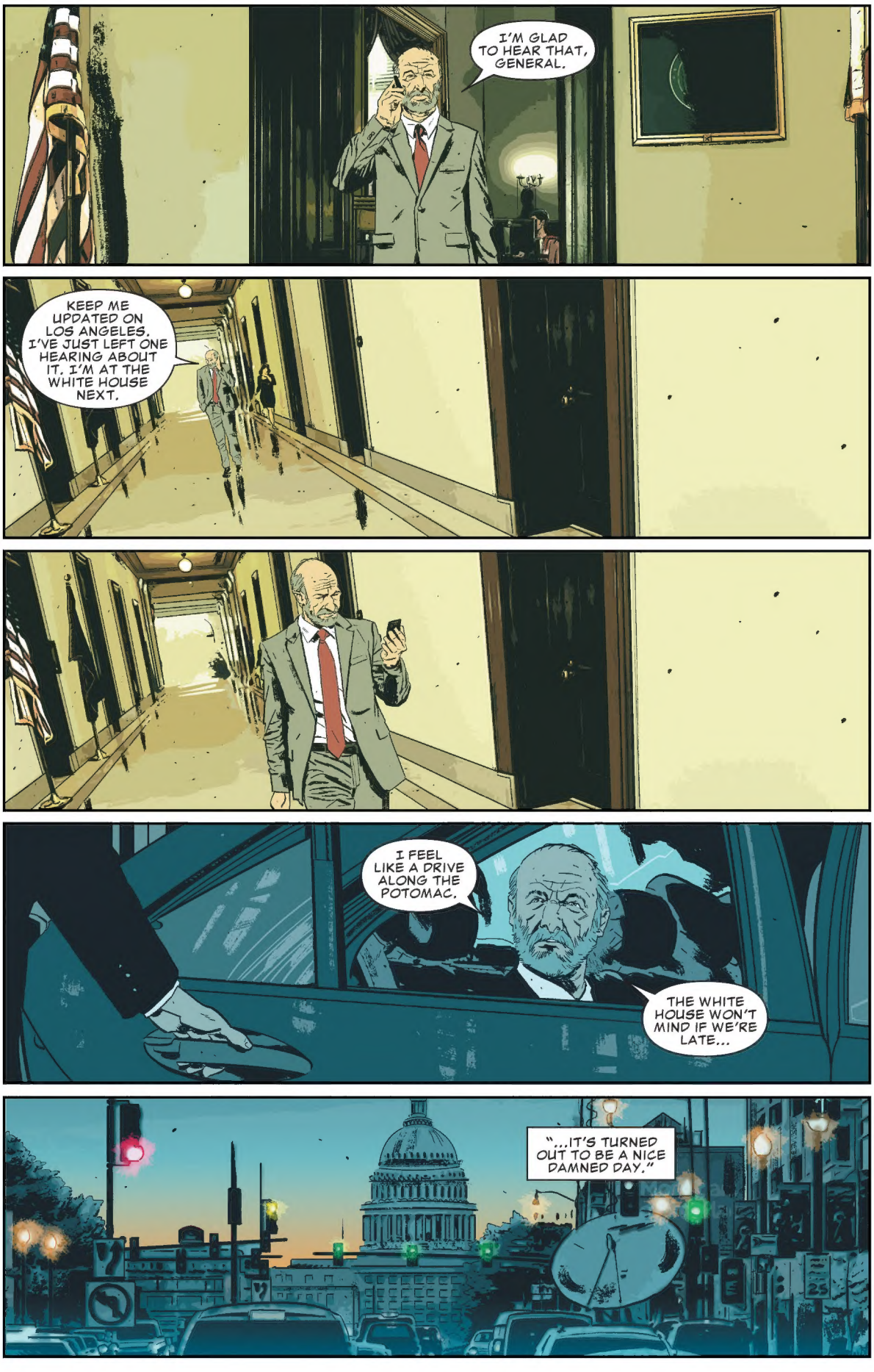
THE HIVE'S BROKEN AND THE BEEKEEPERS ARE HERE.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, SAMMY?

TELL ME WHY I DO THIS?
BECAUSE YOU'RE A SMART SOLDIER. I KNOW YOU ARE, BECAUSE THE ARMY DOESN'T INVEST THAT MUCH TRAINING AND GEAR IN MORONS.
KILL ME... BUT LET ME FINISH THIS.
...
YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE FACES. THE FACES OF THOSE VILLAGERS IN MEXICO. THE GAS DOES *HORRIBLE* THINGS. THANKS TO YOU, THAT GAS WAS ALMOST RELEASED IN L.A.
I FOUND OUT ABOUT THAT GAS, AND THEN YOU SHOWED UP.
THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF.
IS ANYONE GOING TO DIE?
NOT UNLESS THEY DESERVE IT.
I'M NOT OKAY WITH THAT. I DON'T WANT DEATH. *ARE WE CLEAR ABOUT THAT?* I WANT THE TRUTH. I DON'T WANT ANYBODY DEAD.
SOLDIER TO SOLDIER.
OKAY.
BUT I WANT YOU TO PROTECT MY FAMILY, AND TREAT THEM WELL. GET THEM TAKEOUT. GET THEM WHATEVER THEY WANT.
I'M GOING TO NEED TO KNOW WHO'S GIVING YOU YOUR ORDERS.
AND THEN I'M GOING TO NEED YOU TO MAKE A CALL FOR ME.


DON'T TREAT GOOD GUYS LIKE YOU TREAT BAD GUYS.
SOMEONE IN WASHINGTON ONCE TOLD ME--AT A DINNER YEARS AGO, WHEN I WORE STARCHED SHIRTS, SHINED BOOTS--
--THAT'S A CODE INCREASINGLY MORE DIFFICULT TO PRACTICE.
AND NOT JUST BECAUSE THE LINE BETWEEN THE TWO IS MORE AND MORE WREATHED IN SMOKE AND COVERED IN ASH.


BUT BECAUSE I'M NOT THE ONLY GOOD GUY DROWNING...
...AND THEY DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME LEFT.

CUT THEM FREE.
SIDEWINDER, THESE NEW ORDERS?
NO. WE'RE GOING OFF SCRIPT. SO NOW IS THE TIME TO STEP OUT IF MY ORDERS AREN'T AGREEABLE TO YOU.
WE DON'T FOLLOW D.C. WE FOLLOW OUR SERGEANT.
WE PROTECT THEM AT ALL COSTS, GOT IT?
ROGER THAT. CARE TO EXPLAIN?
I'M NOT SURE.
WE'LL FIND OUT AS A TEAM.
FOR NOW, WE PROTECT THEM...
...AND WE GET THEM TAKE-OUT.
SIR? IT'S SIDEWINDER. FRANK CASTLE IS DEAD.


I'M GLAD TO HEAR THAT, GENERAL.
KEEP ME UPDATED ON LOS ANGELES. I'VE JUST LEFT ONE HEARING ABOUT IT. I'M AT THE WHITE HOUSE NEXT.
I FEEL LIKE A DRIVE ALONG THE POTOMAC.
THE WHITE HOUSE WON'T MIND IF WE'RE LATE...
"...IT'S TURNED OUT TO BE A NICE DAMNED DAY."

I'VE BREACHED THE SURFACE.
STILL TIED UP. STILL DROWNING...
...BUT I'VE MANAGED TO SUCK IN A BREATH.
I CAN DO A HELLUVA LOT WITH ONE BREATH.
SHAKER PAINT CO.
PENTAG